

Paper: Key Stage 3

Case study

Read the case study Rags and Riches and discuss the following questions:

- What positive and negative impact does the handmade paper industry have on the local people and the local environment?
- Can you think of any ways the situation could be improved?

SUPPORTED BY



Rags and riches in India

Deforestation in India has led to the traditional wood-based resources needed for paper production becoming increasingly scarce. Environmentally sound methods which move away from large scale industrial paper production are becoming more popular.

The handmade paper industry in India can meet some of the demand for paper products in an environmentally sound way. The main raw materials used in handmade paper making are cotton rags and waste paper which are rich in cellulose - an essential ingredient for paper making. Delhi is an ideal location to find both of these materials because it has a thriving rag trade which provides an abundance of old cloth and vast amounts of used paper.

The collection of the old cloth and paper needed as raw materials however, requires the work of rag pickers. **Conditions for rag pickers** can be dangerous and much of the industry is unregulated.

Handmade paper production has low start up costs, encouraging entrepreneurship; it can be set up in rural areas; it generates more local employment; it is an environmentally sound technology, using fewer resources and causing less pollution than paper mill factories; and it can produce certain specialised varieties of paper, for example, watermark, filter paper and drawing sheets, etc. The cost difference between handmade paper and mill-made paper is marginal.

Handmade paper production is an effective means of creating sustainable livelihoods in rural areas. The workers employed in paper making plants do not usually need previous technical experience or knowledge. This enables the local people, especially unskilled women, to be trained to work in these plants.

Asha is 12 years old. She works as a rag picker on one of the big dumps in Delhi. She cannot go to school as she has to earn money to help her family. By picking rags and selling them to one of the local paper making businesses she can earn money to feed her family. The work is dangerous and difficult and Asha has to take great care not to get hurt as this would prevent her being able to go on to the rubbish dumps.

Dani is 40 years old. He and his brother have managed to set up their own paper making business supplying decorative handmade paper to the local craft industry. The business provides work for 10 women from the nearby slum and also buys paper and cotton waste from some of the local rag pickers. Dani pays a fair price to the rag pickers as he knows conditions are difficult for them. Dani makes a small profit for the paper sold locally, however, if he could sell the handmade paper to other countries his profit could be much bigger. This would enable him to expand his business and employ more staff.